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ABSTRACT

The field of rehabilitation counseling faces many uncertainties in the coming years. Some details of these uncertainties are discussed. The paper provides several examples of past predictions that have not held true. Some current predictions, including the continuation of the current economic upswing, technological innovation, and genetic research are described. Furthermore, researchers can be certain that the number of people with disabilities will continue to increase and that for all people the idea of "coolness" (as created by popular culture) has become a lifestyle template and a marketing strategy will likewise persist. The two challenges rehabilitation professionals face in the immediate future are the degrees to which popular culture discourages commitment and caring, values that have always defined the rehabilitation field. (MKA)

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Bridging the Millennia:

Keynote address of the 15th annual professional development symposium of the Alliance for Rehabilitation Counseling (NRCA/ARCA), Vancouver, Washington, March 4-9, 1998

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Abstract

The field of rehabilitation counseling faces many uncertainties in the coming years. We must attempt to anticipate change, even though predictions of the future have frequently missed the mark. Rehabilitation professionals can be certain of two challenges in the years ahead, as consumers are influenced increasingly by popular culture. Influences of special concern are those that discourage commitment and caring, values that have always defined the rehabilitation field.

Bridging the Millennia

I am very pleased to be here today. I have always been a strong believer in the importance of such conferences. The theme of the symposium is Bridging the Millennia and for that reason a good deal of our focus must be on an attempt to foresee the future, to look with some clarity into what is coming. There is difficulty associated with predicting the future. I brought some examples of predictions made in the past that failed to come true. They are especially interesting in view of their origins. Let me share a few:

*Kenneth Olson, president and founder of Digital Equipment Corporation in 1977 said, "There is no reason for any individual to have a computer in their home".

*Recording executive, Decca Records, 1962 after hearing an audition by an unknown group called the Beatles said "We don't like their sound, and anyway groups of guitars are on the way out".

*In 1946 Darrel F. Zanuck, head of 20th Century Fox Studios said, "Television won't be able to hold onto any market it captures after the first six months. People will soon get tired of staring at a plywood box every night."

*Western Union president William Morton, rejecting Alexander Graham Bells' offer to sell his struggling telephone company to Western Union for $100,000 said, "What use could this company make of an electrical toy".

*Popular Mechanics Magazine 1949, "Computers in the future perhaps will weigh only 1.5 tons.

*Charles Duell, commissioner of patents for the United States in 1899 said "Everything that can be invented has been invented".

*Lord Kelvin, the Scottish mathematician and physicist in 1897 said categorically, "Radio has no future".

So, predicting the future can be hazardous, it is not easy. We cannot know with any certainty what is coming, but we try and we must try. One reason for this is because the pace of change is accelerating. It has been nearly 30 years since Alvin Toffler wrote his important work Future Shock. Toffler pointed out that we live at the dividing line of history. That is to say, as much has happened since I was born

as happened before. Toffler observed in Future Shock in 1970 that ..."if the last 50,000 years of existence were divided into lifetimes of approximately 62 years each, there would have been 800 such lifetimes. Of these 800 lifetimes, fully 650 were lived in caves. Only during the last 70 lifetimes has it been possible to communicate effectively from one lifetime to another, as writing makes it possible to do. Only during the last 6 lifetimes have masses of people seen the printed word. Only during the last 4 has it been possible to measure time with any precision. Only in the last 2 has anyone anywhere used an electric motor. And the overwhelming majority of all the material goods we use in daily life today have been developed within the present, the 800th lifetime." Toffler was speaking about the accelerating pace of change, and the impact of technology on our lives. It is interesting to note that when he wrote these words in 1970 Toffler had never seen a personal computer.

As we look ahead what is being predicted? Futurologists say that the current economic upswing will continue through the next century. We are riding the crest of what will be a long economic boom. This boom will be fueled by the fact that baby boomer earnings will peak in the next several years, purchases that will impact the economy in a positive way will focus on homes, vehicles, leisure pursuits. There will be surging global economic growth. Globalization of the economy will continue, eventually solidifying into three geopolitical mega-markets; the European economic community, the North American economic community, and the Pacific Rim economic community.

The economic boom will contribute to much technological innovation. 90% of scientists and engineers whoever lived are alive and working today. At the present time there are 16 million host computers on the internet. 70% growth is expected per year. Alternative fuels for transportation are expected to decrease the pressure on the environment and enable private vehicle ownership for the 2 billion Asians who will be making the transition to middle class by approximately the year 2020.

Genetic research is expected to bring 1500 gene based diseases under control by the year 2020. A new eugenics era will begin. That is to say, human beings will take deliberate control of their evolution. This means probably that people that carry genetic illnesses will face unprecedented discrimination and invasions of privacy. Life expectancy may reach 80 by the year 2030 with one half of life time health-care costs coming within the last 60 days of life (Molitor, 1997).

What can we say with certainty about tomorrow. One thing is certain, there will be an increasing number of people with disabilities. The US Census Bureau between 1990 and 1994 recorded that the number of Americans with disabilities increased from 49 million to 54 million people. How can we be of help to these individuals? How can we help prepare them for the world that is coming? On the one hand we see a social and technological infrastructure that is changing rapidly, perhaps more rapidly than ever before. On the other hand we see a human nature that, it can be argued, has never changed. Between the two lies a psychological space that attempts to mediate, and it is in that psychological space that rehabilitation counselors have always found their greatest challenge.

There are two aspects of psychological space that I wish to speak about today because I believe that the extent to which we face these challenges will define our relevance and our importance as we bridge the millennia. Both of these challenges come about because of something called the pop culture, a phenomenon in history that was largely brought about by the advancement of technology. Pop culture is a creation of mass media. As we look around the world one of the things we see is the steady erosion and disappearance of indigenous cultures and their replacement with a generic mass consumer culture. In short the world, from Micronesia to the Caucasus, is becoming one big shopping mall.

An important element of popular culture is what Owen Edwards (1992) refers to as the "tyranny of cool". Not long ago I saw a film of Charles Lindbergh after he had returned from his historic flight. And the most interesting thing about watching that film and the people in the film was that they had absolutely no concept of how to behave in front of a camera. There was a spontaneous,

unrehearsed, totally unselfconscious quality to their behavior. What was most obvious about those people, who lived before the age of television and largely before the age of movies, was that they hadn't the slightest idea in the world of how to be cool.

Coolness is a lifestyle template. It is provided to us on a more or less continuous basis by the images we receive from the media. In short it is an implied set of instructions concerning what things to engage and what things to evade. Once one accepts the requirements of being cool a very prohibitive lifestyle follows. Because coolness dictates your choices in terms of clothing, friends, cars, and jobs. It starts very early in life. I remember several years ago walking to work in the morning and taking my son to school. When he was six years old we used to pass the middle school, and as we walked by large numbers of teenage children he would walk closer to me for a sense of security. By the time he was in the third grade I noticed that as we passed the middle school he was lagging behind farther and farther, eventually far enough so that it wouldn't be possible for people to associate him with me. By that point it had become uncool to be seen with your dad. And it was obvious in a hundred little ways that he had changed; how he held his hands in his pockets, the way he stood, the things he said, the looks he gave, and most noticeably of all in the terms of the things he wanted.

Coolness is very much a marketing strategy. It keeps you on the treadmill of consumerism, and it is the most useful of strategies because like a treadmill you can never arrive at the destination. Every pair of Tommy Hilfigers or Foster Grants that you purchase will only take you half the distance to the goal line. Coolness can never be absolutely or permanently achieved.

The most important quality of coolness as an element in popular culture, the most relevant aspect for rehabilitation counseling, is the central defining feature of being cool, that quality of detachment, that untouchable air of indifference the cool individual has. The cool person adopts a conviction that nothing really matters very much. To be cool means to develop an attitude of skepticism even cynicism. It means developing a lifestyle of hedging all of ones bets. It means being aloof, and

standoffish. If you are cool you cannot get too excited about any given thing. You cannot show you care. You cannot make commitments and you cannot start at the bottom and work your way up life. In summary then, coolness is a serious impediment to finding oneself, to getting started in life and, to obtaining happiness.

I would like to share with you some feedback I received from employers in the Billings area concerning their experiences interviewing young people for positions for employment. One employer said, "My biggest beef with anybody is how they conduct themselves in front of a customer. We need people who give a good representation of the company to the public. People who can follow instructions people who are interested in meeting the minimum requirements of the job."

Another employer said, "Are applicants appropriately dressed? The image of my company is important to me. I have spent my life building this company. I know some young people want to make a statement by the way they are dressed. My feeling is that is great, go make your statement out on the street, not in my company. The biggest mistake is to wear jeans to an interview. Some are ill prepared to fill out the application, don't have anything to write with or know references. I have a supply of pencils with the secretary, if I get an application in pencil that means they had to ask for something to write with, I will tear it up."

Another employer said, "There is a dress code. People have come here barefoot, in tennis shoes, jeans, shorts, and dirty clothes. That tells me the person does not care about the work. They need to know how to present themselves in an orderly and self confident way. The person should be interested more in a career than a job. Some ask us about breaks, vacation time, and days off. Just once I would like an applicant to ask abut a retirement plan or promotion policies."

In the age of the sound bite, the catch phase, and the one liner the rehabilitation counselor's job is going to be to promote commitment, to help young people find within themselves the ability to make investments in life leading to commitments. First of all it is important for young people to realize that they have a life to commit. A real person is waiting inside for the chance to develop, and in

order for that to happen it is necessary to stop caring what Dennis Rodman or Madonna would do in any particular situation. Increasingly, rehabilitation counselors will find themselves combating the weight and the inertia of mass media in popular culture. We must help young people realize that the things we all want -- identity, security, and respect -- come to us not through the affectation of a certain style but through the development of genuine relationships, relationships that are based on investments leading to commitment.

Another by-product of popular culture that I want to mention today is apathy. Let me share an overhead. The young man seated in the wheel chair in this picture is my uncle Shelburn Zollman. He contracted polio three years before what the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis records as the first major polio epidemic in this nation. He used a wheel chair his entire life. The photograph is one that appeared in a high school newspaper, The Stadium World. Is anyone here from Tacoma? This was in 1928. Standing next to him was his friend Wendel Tanberg. During the period in which my uncle lived his world was filled with challenges. There was no ADA at that period of time.

Stadium High School is an interesting structure. It was originally built as a Grand Hotel in 1903. I believe it was gutted by fire and then converted into a high school some time around 1906. It is a magnificent building. From a distance it looks like a castle on the Rhine. In terms of accessibility it is a nightmare. It is four stories tall. Each story has 12 foot ceilings. My uncle attended high school at Stadium for three years. He was able to attend classes because Wendel Tanberg carried him on his back.

My mother remembers that when my uncle was ready for the first grade in the Tacoma public school system, the first grade teacher at the elementary school refused to allow him into the classroom. She said he would have a destabilizing effect on the other children. Try as my grandmother did, she was unable to persuade this elementary school teacher to change her mind. The principle of the school was unable to help.

My uncle was eventually welcomed into the second grade. He was able to enter the second grade because for one year a woman my grandmother knew provided home schooling free of charge to prepare my uncle for the second grade. My uncle's story is a happy one. He became a very successful person. Among other things he was probably the wealthiest member of my extended family. He succeeded in large part because of a strong combination of imagination and determination. But there is another part to my uncle's story which is important to recognize. Because I believe it will be just as relevant in the next century as it has been in this one. My uncle's path in life was illuminated in many places by the presence of people who cared. Long before we heard the term natural supports, caring was a vital feature in rehabilitation counseling.

Now as in the past, the success of a rehabilitation venture so often turns on the counselors ability to answer one question, 'Am I able to find someone who cares'? Caring is reeling from 20 years of sustained assault in popular culture. 1980, the year that I became a Rehabilitation Counselor, was a pivotal year. Do you remember 1980? The Reagan administration was swept into office on pledges of reducing the size of the Federal Government. Every sort of political reactionary came out of the woodwork, certain in that year that their hour had struck. Caring became the victim of a continuous public relations attack. Apologists for the wealthy used every device of rhetoric and persuasion to convince us that we should only care about one thing, the accumulation of private wealth.

The attack on caring paved the way for a massive transfer of wealth in this country. In those years between 1977 and 1992 the income of the top 1% in the United States grew by 91%. The combined wealth of the top 1% of Americans now equals that of the bottom 95%. Also during those years between 1970 and 1994 the median AFDC payment to a family of 3 on welfare was cut by 47% (Fulbre, 1997; Sklar, 1995). During this period of time corporate executive salaries skyrocketed. At a time when the rehabilitation allocation is frozen, it might interest you to know that last year Disney's CEO Michael Eisner received a annual salary – that is to say, his salary for a 12 month period of time -- was $204,000,000 (Kadlec, 1997).

Part of the attack on caring focuses on us, on rehabilitation counseling. It has become common place for people to be innately suspicious of government. Public service, which was once thought of as the highest expression of civic duty, is now popularly viewed as just another form of white collar crime. Technological progress will exacerbate this problem not alleviate it. Just as the face to face encounter, the unhurried interaction between people promotes the things that are right, the era of the sound bite with its emphasis on the superficial and the sensational promotes between people the things that are wrong.

I brought along today some examples of information from the world wide web that I would like to share. One example concerns a report from a group concerned about taxes with the activities of Christopher Reeve. Recently Reeve testified before the congress appealing for increases for research funds in the area of spinal cord injury. In this report, downloaded from the web, the author makes the following statements, "Christopher Reeve is not the only person to overcome a horrid physical tragedy. Reeve got to make his pitch for more spinal cord injury research because he is a leftist celebrity". It goes on, "In the Christopher Reeve world of socialized medicine throwing money out on ludicrous, inept projects is all too common. The propose of government bureaucracies is to perpetuate themselves at any cost". It goes on, "Al Gore traded in his dead sister for votes and Christopher Reeve tried to use his tragedy to pick the tax payers pockets". Another report downloaded from the web from another right wing group concerned about taxes attacks the Americans with Disabilities Act and states the following, "In the real world that $100 trip up the wheel chair ramp is a road that does not get built or a thief that does not get arrested". I wonder how many of you are aware that by supporting the ADA we were really promoting crime? If you accepted everything you read on the world wide web, that is what you would believe.

In my opinion the attack on caring probably reached its low point on February 4th this year with the airing of the ABC television network special titled Greed in America which was hosted by John Stossel. The program did not attempt to distinguish between greed and self interest mediated by ethics and social conscience.

It simply proclaimed greed as the strongest influence contributing to the rise of civilization. During the telecast a philosopher, Dr. Kelly, made the assertion that the contribution and message to the world of Mother Teresa of Calcutta was not as important as that of junk bond king, Michael Milken. His rationale, that Milken's financing scheme helped build MCI which many of us use to enjoy slightly lower long distance telephone rates. If we are to be successful in the field of rehabilitation we must stand against the attacks on caring, we must promote caring in our communities.

So as we bridge the millennia we may ask what are the values that make us members of a professional community. What ideals do we share. I am sure that if this discussion, this discussion of basic professional values were carried out to any length at all, we would recognize that as a profession we have always stood -- and we must stand in the future-- for commitment and caring. We must help people lift their heads above the commonplace requirements of daily life and realize that there are contributions to be made. Every day we have opportunities to care for each other.

So, in closing I would like to say the following; commitment and caring have been principles that have carried us through the years across many fields of political struggle and social progress. As we bridge the millennia the values of commitment and caring must be our watch words. They must be the principles that lead us forward. Next year a freshman class enters college consisting of young people born in 1980. They will not remember within their lifetime a public service that was not vilified. As a profession and as individuals we must renew our resolve to promote commitment and caring in our communities and to articulate these values to those who wish to better understand rehabilitation counseling. We must, as William Byron (1997) recently stated, persuade people that "life is only lived well when it is lived generously in the service of others"(p. 653).

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'A Friend in Need Is a Friend Indeed' Illustrated Here

Pal Serves Shelburne Zollman Faithfully Through Many Years

By Gwendolyn Leggee

At least one Stadium boy faithfully and cheerfully serves the friend who needs him. Day in and day out, without thought of recompense, he helps his friend to and from classes, and assists him to attend classes on the upper floors. With the exception of first and second periods, the boys are together during the entire school day, their programs being specially ar-

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Dramatic Club

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